



Should We Pardon Them?

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Source: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Spring, 1996), pp. 552-572

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](http://www.press.uchicago.edu)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344023>

Accessed: 25/10/2011 06:12

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Should We Pardon Them?

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Translated by Ann Hobart

Foreword

*It is sometimes said that the deportees, the Jews, and the members of the Resistance begin to tire their contemporaries by too often invoking Auschwitz and Oradour. Our contemporaries, it seems, have had enough of it. They would like us to speak of something else. The survivors of the massacre are of another opinion on this point. Thus I permit myself in this essay to contribute to the weariness of those who are bothered by such horrible memories. My friend Henry Bulawko, president of the Amicale des Anciens Déportés Juifs de France, did not deem these pages anachronistic, however belated they may be. I am unable to express all that their appearance owes to him. May he find here the expression of my fraternal gratitude. My warm thanks also go out to Roger Maria, without whom *Pardonner?* would have forever remained unpublished.*

*This essay develops the themes that I defended in 1965 during the debates regarding statutory limitations for Nazi war crimes. In February 1965, under the title "L'Imprescriptible," I pleaded against a pardon in *La Revue administrative*, and I now thank the editor of this journal, Robert Catherine, whose friendship thus allows my voice to be heard. This article itself had its origin in a letter published in the "Libres opinions" section of *Le Monde* on 3 January 1965. Since all opinions are "free," mine, thank God, is as well. I am lucky. One must take a side in this matter. The insurmountable horror that every normal person feels when thinking about the death camps, this horror is a "free" opinion. Could it be that someone could profess the opposite opinion? To applaud the ovens of the crematoria, could that by*

Critical Inquiry 22 (Spring 1996)

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any chance be an opinion? In any event, my own opinion is at minimum an opinion among others. And from now on it is, moreover, an official opinion, by virtue of a unanimous vote of the French parliament. Since this opinion does not run contrary to conventional morality, I will develop and justify it here.

In Le Pardon, a purely philosophical work that I have published elsewhere,¹ the answer to the question, Must we pardon? seems to contradict the one given here. Between the absolute of the law of love and the absolute of vicious liberty there is a tear that cannot be entirely sundered. I have not attempted to reconcile the irrationality of evil with the omnipotence of love. Forgiveness is as strong as evil, but evil is as strong as forgiveness.²

Should We Pardon Them?

Is it time to pardon, or at least to forget? Twenty years are enough, it would seem, for the unpardonable to become miraculously pardonable: by right and from one day to the next the unforgettable is forgotten. A crime that had been unpardonable until May 1965 thus suddenly ceases to be so in June—as if by magic. And thus the official or legal forgetting begins tonight at midnight. It is justifiable to pursue a criminal for twenty years, but from the beginning of the twenty-first those who have not yet forgiven become subject in their turn to debarment and are classified as spiteful. Twenty years: that is the time limit. And yet now is the first time that the most indifferent have realized the full horror of the catastrophe. Yes, it has taken them twenty years to realize its gigantic dimensions, as after a crime out of all proportion to everyday wrongdoing or after a very great tragedy the effects and extent of which can only be measured gradually. The factories of extermination and especially Auschwitz, the most grandiose among them, are in fact like all very important things: their lasting consequences do not appear at first but develop over time and do not stop growing. And as for the survivors of the immense massacre, they rub their eyes in amazement; they learn every day what they already knew—knew, but not fully. Returned from those distant and terrifying shores, they look at one another in silence.

In becoming conscious now of the worldwide catastrophe triggered by Hitler's Germany, two faces can be discerned: on the one hand the epic of the Resistance and on the other the tragedy of deportation; on the one hand the heroism of the *maquis* and the triumphs of Free France, magnified by the stirring words of Malraux, and on the other the death camps; on the one hand Jean Moulin, honored by a crowd of patriots in a flurry of waving flags on the steps of the glorious Panthéon, on the

1. See Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Pardon* (Paris, 1967).

2. This foreword is of course the same as the one that appeared in Jankélévitch, *Pardonner?* (Paris, 1971).

other Jean Moulin tortured, disfigured, panting, savagely trampled underfoot by brutes—because the deportee and the Resistance fighter very often were one and the same. On one side Bir Hakeim and the Paris barricades, on the other . . . on the other an unnameable, unmentionable, and terrifying thing, a thing from which one diverts one's thought and that no human speech dares describe. Orchestras played Schubert while the detained were hanged. Women's hair was stockpiled. Gold teeth were removed from cadavers. That unspeakable thing whose name we hesitate to pronounce is called Auschwitz. It was in that accursed place that what Claudel calls the monstrous orgies of hate were celebrated. People of our generation sometimes feel like the bearers of a heavy and unmentionable secret that separates them from their children. How can they tell them the truth? We claim that the survivor of Verdun ordinarily does not speak voluntarily of the monstrous and mournful country from which he comes. But what is the secret of Verdun in comparison to the secret of Auschwitz?

This shameful secret that we cannot tell is the secret of World War II and, in some measure, the secret of modern humanity; even if we do not speak of it, the immense Holocaust weighs on our modernity like invisible remorse. *Comment s'en débarrasser?* This title of a play by Ionesco characterizes quite well the anxieties of today's apparently good conscience. The crime was too serious, the responsibility too solemn, Rabi remarks with cruel lucidity. How will they rid themselves of their latent remorse? "Anti-Zionism" is in this respect an unexpected windfall, because it gives us permission and even the right—even the duty—to be anti-Semitic in the name of democracy. Anti-Zionism is justified anti-Semitism, finally put at the disposal of all. It grants permission to be democratically anti-Semitic. And if the Jews were themselves Nazis? That would be marvelous. It would no longer be necessary to pity them; they would have deserved their fate. This is how our contemporaries rid themselves of their problem. For all alibis are good that allow them finally to think of something else. I propose to bring them back to this problem in the pages that follow.

The Imprescriptible

O thick black smoke of the crematoria—flags floating over all the cities in the tresses of the wind. Why do you strangle me in my sleep? Would my throat have become a chimney for you to spread your imprecations through me?

—DORA TEITELBOIM

Let me say it bluntly to begin with: all the juridical criteria regarding statutory limitations usually applicable to common law crimes are in this case beside the point. In the first place, it is an international crime, and the Germans have no grounds to reproach us for interfering in their

business; it is not “their business.” This affair is the business of all the trampled nations. Germany, that is the accused, is moreover in fact the only country that has no business entering into the question. Next, the assassination of millions of Jews, Resistance fighters, and Russians is not a news item comparable, for example, to the murder of a woman of independent means that occurred twenty years ago at Montélimar. The crimes of the Germans are exceptional from every point of view—for their enormity, for their unbelievable sadism. But above all, they are crimes *against humanity* in the proper sense of the term, that is, crimes against the human essence or, if you will, against the “hominity” of human beings in general. Properly speaking Germany did not want to destroy beliefs judged to be erroneous or doctrines considered to be pernicious. It was the very being of humanity, *esse*, that racial genocide attempted to annihilate in the suffering flesh of these millions of martyrs. Racist crimes are an assault against the human being *as human being*, not against such and such a person, inasmuch as he is this or that (*quatenus*)—communist, Freemason, or ideological adversary, for example. No, the racist truly aimed at the beingness of the being, that is, at the human of every human being. Anti-Semitism is a grave offense against human beings in general. The Jews were persecuted because it was them, and not at all because of their opinions or their faith. It was existence itself that was denied them; they were not reproached for professing this or that, they were reproached for being. To a certain degree this refusal extends even today to the existence of the state of Israel. It is an immense concession, an unmerited gift that is believed to be conferred on Israel in according it the right to exist, as if that recognition were not the elementary and vital right that every human being ought to respect in every other human being, and this without negotiations of any kind, without any claim to gratitude. Or to take up here the beautiful title of the newspaper founded by Bernard Lecache: We must respect our neighbor’s right to live, and our neighbor owes us nothing in return—except the same respect. But with a Jew it is unnecessary to trouble oneself. With a Jew everything is permitted. When it is a Jew that is in question, *being* is not self-evident. The enemies of Israel do not “recognize” the existence of Israel. Israel is transparent, nonexistent. One does not negotiate, one does not enter into dialogue with what does not exist. But it is not evident that a Jew must exist. A Jew must always justify himself, excuse himself for living and breathing. His pretentiousness in fighting for subsistence and survival is in itself an incomprehensible scandal, an exorbitance. The idea that these “subhumans” may defend themselves fills the superhumans with indignant astonishment. A Jew does not have the right to be; his sin is to exist. As the Inquisitors, by annihilating the heretics with exterminating fire, suppressed the Other, which existed only by some inexplicable inadvertence of God, and thus claimed to accomplish the divine will, so the Germans, by annihilating the accursed race in the ov-

ens of the crematoria, radically suppressed the existence of those who should not have existed. And thus the sadists who made soap from the cadavers of deportees were not trying to increase production or improve their yield. The colonialist, when he exploits indigenous populations, is above all a businessman in search of labor at low cost with an eye toward surplus value, and he uses human cattle as an instrument of labor. But the Jew is not a simple “instrument of labor” for the German;³ beyond that he is *himself primary material*. The indigenous person may one day join the ranks of the colonizers and in his turn exploit other indigenous people; the proletarian may become an overseer, or a boss, or even a bourgeois. But the crime of being a Jew is inexpiable. Nothing can erase that curse: neither political affiliation, nor wealth, nor conversion. The German insult, the insult that tramples underfoot, that uses women’s hair as a mineral substance, that infinite insult is thus a *purely gratuitous* insult. This insult is not contemptuous so much as it is wicked because its purpose is to debase and degrade in order to annihilate. Such relentlessness has something sacred and supernatural about it; but I will dwell no longer on the role that an age-old religious education could have played here, since Jules Isaac has done it before me. If the prejudice against an “accursed people,” against a “deicide” people guilty of an original sin, is deeply engrained in the collective unconscious, it is the German who in effect takes on the annihilation of the reprobates. Thus the extermination of the Jews is the product of pure wickedness, of *ontological* wickedness, of the most diabolical and gratuitous wickedness that history has ever known. This crime was not motivated, even by “villainous” motives. This crime against nature, this unmotivated crime, this exorbitant crime is thus to the letter a *metaphysical* crime; and the criminals guilty of this crime are not mere fanatics, nor simply blind doctrinaires, nor simply abominable dogmatists—they are, in the proper sense of the word, *monsters*. When an act denies the essence of a human being as a human being, the statutory limitations that in the name of morality would lead one to absolve that act itself contradict morality. Is it not contradictory and even absurd to call for a pardon in this case? To forget this gigantic crime against humanity would be a new crime against the human species.

The time that dulls all things, the time that uses up sorrow as it erodes mountains, the time that favors pardon and forgetfulness, the time that consoles, settling and healing time, does not diminish in the least the colossal slaughter; on the contrary, it never ceases to revive its horror. The vote of the French parliament quite rightly expresses a principle and, as it were, an a priori impossibility. Crimes against humanity are *imprescriptible*, that is, the penalties against them *cannot* lapse; time has

3. See Georges Wellers, *Le Système concentrationnaire nazi* (Paris, 1965), which is particularly moving in its sobriety. The important thesis of Olga Wormser-Migot, *Le Système concentrationnaire nazi 1933–45* (Paris, 1968), remains the principal and definitive work on this topic.

no hold on them. This is not to say that a prorogation of ten years would be necessary to punish the guilty that remain. It is in general incomprehensible that time, a natural process without normative value, could have a diminishing effect on the unbearable horror of Auschwitz. Boissarie, standing before the Action Committee of the Resistance, gave the lie to the two grounds generally invoked to justify statutory limitations. Being a crime of worldwide proportions, the proof does not disappear with time but, on the contrary, multiplies. And public emotion in its turn does not diminish over time but never ceases to intensify. Many frivolous people who did not want to believe have been forced to learn; with the help of the Frankfurt trials they are beginning now to realize what it was that they had diverted their thoughts from. Even though organized gracefully and in apparently bad faith, with the intention of hypocritically justifying statutory limitations in advance, this trial and the ones that followed it will, despite them, have nevertheless served some purpose. One is also tempted to say, in all conscience, that the Israelis were right to abduct Eichmann and to try him themselves. Without this Israeli commando raid, the indifference of Argentine justice and the complicity of the police would no doubt have permitted the provisioner of Auschwitz, as it had permitted Ante Pavelić, the bloody butcher of Slovenia, to die in his bed like a good bourgeois. All the juridical norms that can be invoked against that abduction—Argentine sovereignty, human rights, and so on—seem inadequate and are to be dismissed when one thinks of the immensity of the crimes committed. If only there had been a commando raid of Resistance fighters in France to abduct General Lammerding, the butcher of Oradour, and to keep him as well from dying in his bed, surrounded by the affection of his loved ones.

What more can be said about Auschwitz? I refer here to the admirable article by A.-M. Rosenthal, the most beautiful and without a doubt the most deeply moving that was ever written on this place of unbearable horror. Let me first of all quote Rosenthal, who was a pilgrim to that hell:

Perhaps the most horrible thing about Brzezinka [Auschwitz], was that the sun was warm and bright, the rows of poplars exquisite to contemplate, and that near the entrance children played on the grass. If the sun shone, if young laughter could be heard, if nature was luminous and green, it seemed that this could only have been the effect of some prodigious anomaly, as though arising in nightmares. It would have been fitting for the grass to wither underfoot and for the sun never to shine, for Brzezinka is a place of inexpressible terror. And yet every day, from all parts of the globe, visitors arrive at Brzezinka, which is probably the most sinister tourist site in the world. They come for many reasons: to see that it was really possible, to not forget, to pay homage to the dead simply by looking at the place of their suffering. There is nothing new to say about Auschwitz, if it were not that one feels compelled to testify. One feels that

it is impossible to visit Auschwitz and to walk away without a word, without a line; that would be, it seems, a grave lack of courtesy toward those who died there.⁴

Years have passed since the last lot of unfortunates “entered nude into the gas chambers, forced by dogs and guards.”⁵ By guards worse than their dogs. For that was possible. This crime without a name is a truly infinite crime whose horror deepens the more it is analyzed. One thought he knew and yet did not know, nor to what extent. I myself who have so many reasons to know, every day I learn something new, some particularly revolting invention, some particularly ingenious torture, some Machiavellian atrocity in which the mark of the old hereditary vampirism can be recognized. To make soap or light shades from the skin of deportees . . . this had to be thought up. One must be a vampire-metaphysician to make that discovery. Thus one should not be surprised if an unfathomable crime begets as it were inexhaustible meditation. The novel inventions of cruelty, the most diabolical abysses of perversity, the unimaginable refinements of hate, all of this leaves us mute and above all confounds the spirit. The bottom of this mystery of gratuitous evil has never been sounded.

Properly speaking, this grandiose massacre is not a crime on a human scale any more than are astronomical magnitudes and light years. Also, the reactions that it inspires are above all despair and a feeling of powerlessness before the irreparable. One can do nothing. One cannot give life back to that immense mountain of miserable ashes. One cannot punish the criminal with a punishment proportional to his crime: for in relation to the infinite all finite magnitudes tend to equal one another; hence the penalty hardly seems to matter; strictly speaking, what happened is *inexpiable*. One does not even know any more whom to arrest, whom to accuse. Will we accuse those honest bourgeois from the provinces who formerly were officers of the SS? Close up, the executioner is rather sympathetic, and sadism cannot always be read in the face of the sadist. Will we accuse those placid and easygoing German tourists who look so well and must surely have good consciences? They would certainly be astonished to be thus taken to task and would wonder what we could want them for and what it was all about. The descendants of the executioners are in a good mood, and they find it completely natural to travel in noisy packs, as though nothing were wrong, across that Europe which their armies had submerged in fire and blood. No one here below has a bad conscience, that is well known. No one is guilty because no one was ever a Nazi; thus the monstrous genocide, a catastrophe in itself like earthquakes, tidal waves, and the eruptions of Vesuvius, is not the fault

4. A.-M. Rosenthal, “Rien de nouveau à Auschwitz: Où prier?” *L’Observateur du Moyen-Orient*, 12 Sept. 1958, p. 23.

5. *Ibid.*

of anyone. One may as well accuse the devil! The devil, Jung says, has always existed, the devil existed before man, the devil is the eternal principle that has perverted pure humanity! And thus there will always be evil ones. Strictly speaking the inculcation of the devil is not a monstrous absurdity but rather a providential convenience. For the devil has broad shoulders; he can take on everything! From the moment that it becomes the fault of the "eternal principle," it is obviously no longer the fault of Eichmann or of Bormann or of anyone at all.

So philosophical a discovery would obviously satisfy the advocates of statutory limitations. Could there be any chance be people capable of finding attenuating circumstances for the wretches who killed children with injections of phenol to the heart and performed experiments on pregnant women? Alas, I am afraid I must acknowledge that such indulgent advocates exist; they are neither horrified by the massacre of six million Jews nor particularly astonished by the gas chambers. They find these crimes in no way exceptional; they are not convinced of their monstrosity; they are not in agreement, it seems, as to the number of millions. How many millions would it take to move them? A journalist full of good sense even found that the difference between Hitler's crimes and those of others was simply(!) quantitative. According to the qualitative criteria of this brilliant journalist, the millions of exterminated Jews and Resistance fighters doubtless were not sufficiently distinguished victims. Other essayists in search of alibis have recently discovered that there were Jewish capos whom the Germans themselves put in charge of overseeing and denouncing their comrades. Never having found, as everyone knows, Christian accomplices in the occupied countries, the Germans thus found some among the Jews? What a windfall for a good conscience that, in spite of everything, feels a bit heavy and even vaguely guilty! One can imagine the enthusiasm with which a certain segment of the public rushed to that attractive perspective—were the Jews perhaps themselves collaborators after all? Now there is a providential discovery! And if by chance the Jews exterminated themselves? If by chance the deportees shut themselves into the gas chambers? These Jews are so bad that they are capable of having themselves incinerated in the crematoria on purpose, out of pure wickedness, to be as disagreeable as possible to us their unfortunate contemporaries. For the Jews are always wrong: wrong in living; wrong in dying; wrong in taking up arms against the cutthroats who dream of exterminating the survivors of Auschwitz; wrong in letting themselves be massacred; wrong in defending themselves; wrong in not defending themselves; obliged to give evidence of their ordeal before those who peacefully went about their business during the occupation; required to make their account to former collaborators and to take lessons from them on the proper means of resisting torturers; defended with rather patronizing condescension by magnanimous spirits who never took the slightest risk for the Resistance. In any case, we see here

our polemicists unburdened of so many disagreeable scruples and morally justified in no longer thinking of them.

One must take a side: concentration camps stir up numerous polemics. Polemics over Auschwitz? Yes, as astounding as this may appear: polemics! A person with any feeling or sense obviously must ask himself what such polemics could be about and how it is that the polemicists have not taken this opportunity to remain silent. But no! People debate with virtuosity when they could just as easily be quiet, and *contestation*, to use today's term, proceeds at a brisk pace. The most horrible evidence, the most hallowed and cruel sentiments that a person can experience are handed over as fodder for debate. Our dialecticians are in rare form, perfectly at their ease, and they seem in no way disturbed to have to sustain such a horrible discussion. "The Treblinka affair," they say. One is tempted, as the only possible response, to put before their eyes the hallucinatory commemorative photo album that our friends from the Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Résistants published on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps. Let us leave them alone before these horrible images and tell them to sleep well, if they can.

It must be said again: the assessment of the degree of guilt of the wretches who massacred Jewish children en masse and then gathered up their little shoes, this assessment *is not a subject of debate*. In a debate there is a pro and a con and a mixture of pro and con, as there is at the Société Française de Philosophie or at the colloquia of Cerisy-la-Salle. France has for some years been in a permanent state of colloquium. But Auschwitz, I repeat, is not a subject for a colloquium; Auschwitz precludes dialogue and literary conversation. The mere idea of confronting pro with con in this case has something shameful and absurd about it; such a confrontation is a grave indecency with respect to the tortured. Roundtables, as they are called, are for the games to which our brilliant talkers give themselves over each summer during the leisure hours of their vacations, but the death camps are incompatible with this kind of debate and philosophical babble. Moreover, Nazism is not an "opinion," and we must not get in the habit of debating it with its advocates. I must insist again: the unnameable sufferings of which Auschwitz remains the monstrous symbol exclude the mediocrity of feeling and the pedantry of hairsplitting, nor are they designed for the professional humorists of Munich and elsewhere. No, we do not feel like joking. Thus we withdraw from the "colloquium," having nothing to say to the brilliant casuists who look upon the crematoria as they look upon the horrors of war in general. Auschwitz is not, like pillaging, bombing, and the difficulties of furnishing supplies, one of those good and decent misfortunes common to all honorable disasters. Auschwitz is unmentionable. Auschwitz is not simply a particular case of human barbarism. Nor was that war like any other. And the Resistance fighters who said no to servitude are not simply "veterans." It is

one of the most convenient alibis of a good conscience to represent the Second World War as a simple settling of accounts between adversaries, a settling of accounts with, according to custom, indemnities of war, reparations, and annexation of territory; once accounts were settled, it is no longer clear why the little Franco-German misunderstanding would still occupy our thoughts. In this vulgar dispute, one winds up having trouble distinguishing if it was in fact Germany that advanced upon France or—who knows?—France upon Germany. But Hitler's war does not resemble the First World War in any way. The generous pacifism of Romain Rolland that challenged traditional chauvinism, which was nationalist and militarist, set itself apart from the "Franco-German conflict." But after 1939 one could no longer be "above the fray"; that is why the Resistance was not above but *inside* it. I insist again: Auschwitz is not an "atrociousness of war" but a *work of hatred*. A quasi-inextinguishable work of hatred. I read somewhere that Treblinka was made possible by Verdun. Verdun is, in effect, like Borodino, virtually the classic example of the horrors of war justly stigmatized by Goya and Vereshchagin. Like Borodino, but much more successful. A grandiose slaughter. However, the shells of Verdun did not single out a damned race. In the complacent evocation of these memories, veterans even find motives for dignity, schoolchildren a lesson in heroism, politicians an opportunity to celebrate the Franco-German "fellowship of arms." An episode of glory, I tell you, for two "great" peoples inexplicably risen against one another⁶ and now reconciled in a general transport of passionate feeling. One can understand, after all, why the "Franco-German rapprochement" so little affects the Jews, why finally that "reconciliation" does not concern them in any way. That Germany renounces all wars of aggression and any pan-Germanic designs on France is already a lot, and we congratulate ourselves over this. But military invasion and the extermination of Jews are two distinct enterprises, enterprises that only partially overlap and that in the final analysis can go without one another. In 1914 there was an invasion, but there was no Auschwitz. And, reciprocally, one can easily conceive a situation in which those who regretted having launched the imperialist war would in no way regret Auschwitz. In this situation, rather similar to that of 1940, the Jews would be considered the principal obstacles to the great Franco-German reconciliation; those detestable Jews impede Franco-German conferences, Franco-German love fests and feasts. It is necessary to understand the Jews. They do not simply feel, in common with their fellow citizens, the legitimate resentment nursed in relation to the torturers of France. They are in addition especially concerned, intimately offended, personally humiliated.

Can the inexplicable, the inconceivable horror of Auschwitz be reduced to the indeterminate abstractions known as violence, heavyartil-

6. Thanks to the Jews no doubt.

lery, or the horrors of war? That is to wish to drown the problem in pious generalities, to trivialize or discreetly dissolve the exceptional quality of genocide, to speak of everything in relation to nothing in particular.⁷ As every conceptual explanation is in some sense reassuring, one can already feel reassured by the idea of subsuming Nazi anti-Semitism under a law, of placing the death camps in a historic framework or in a trivializing context. What if by chance Auschwitz was only a particular example of a more general phenomenon? This confusion attests to the difficulty that one experiences when trying to make the bad-faith quibblers understand the specificity of each problem, to fix the attention of the muddleheaded on a definite event. The muddleheaded have their choice of many means to evade the uniqueness of Auschwitz, for any periphrasis is good that will allow us to skirt those two horrible syllables and to speak of something else. I have said that the problem of Auschwitz for distinguished intellects seems to inhere in these words: How to unburden ourselves of it? The most shrewd among our brilliant talkers invoke the crimes of Stalin, decidedly providential crimes since they use them to excuse those of Hitler. But the crimes of Stalin are not an answer to everything. An even better one has been found, too: Hitler was inspired by the sultan who organized the odious massacre of Armenians at the beginning of the century. If the Jews were exterminated, it was ultimately the fault of Abdülhamîd. An eminent historian has even written that the “drownings at Nantes” under the Terror were the true precedent of Auschwitz and Treblinka. Thus nothing happened to the Jews that was not very ordinary, nor was our eminent colleague in any way astonished by it. We scarcely have to wait for the result of these comparisons. After a certain time no one will know any longer what it was all about. Which was obviously the end sought after.

But today it is about neither the slaughter of Armenians, nor the hell of Verdun, nor torture in Algeria, nor Stalin’s purges, nor segregationist violence in the United States, nor the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre; it is about the most monstrous crime in history and about the definitive quietus promised to the criminals who committed this crime. In the face of such a revolting crime, the natural impulse of a person of feeling is not to throw oneself into the archives nor to do research on the history of violence that is more or less comparable; a person of feeling will not wonder in what way he might exonerate the guilty or excuse the horrible torturers. The natural impulse of a person of feeling is to become indignant and to fight passionately against forgetfulness and to pursue the criminals, as the judges of the Allied Tribunal at Nuremberg promised, to the ends of the earth. But our distinguished talkers have something

7. André Neher rightly opposes this trivialization. See his “Dimensions et limites du dialogue judéo-allemand depuis 1945,” *Cahiers de l’institut de science économique appliquée*, no. 132 (Dec. 1962).

better to do; they absolutely must evade the atrocious genocide and find in history other Auschwitzes that will dilute the horror of the true Auschwitz. I can only call this inversion of the most natural impulses of the heart and mind *perversity*. When all is said and done, only unpunished criminals, only Doctor Mengele and his kind, would be interested in such alibis now. If everyone "did the same," as the friends of Doctor Mengele are only too happy to prove, it is obviously pointless to become indignant; if everyone is guilty, no one is guilty. Let us speak of everything; let us speak of nothing. Thus let us speak of something else.

And, yet, let us speak of it all the same. In the first place a crime was never excused by alleging that others would perhaps also be capable of committing it. Moreover, this crime is comparable to nothing. No, Auschwitz and Treblinka resemble nothing—not simply because in general nothing is the same thing as anything else but particularly because nothing is the same thing as Auschwitz. This crime is incommensurable with anything else whatsoever. I was going to say that it is a metaphysical abomination. With their six million dead, the Jews are certainly at the top of the list of martyrs for all time. A sad distinction, alas, and may no one challenge these privileged scapegoats of Gothic hatred. When one speaks to the perverse about Auschwitz, they counter with the suffering of the Germans during the war: the destruction of their cities, the exodus of their inhabitants before the victorious Russian army. To each his own martyrs, no? The mere idea of comparing or speaking in the same breath of the unspeakable ordeal of the deportees and the just punishment of their torturers, this idea is a calculated piece of treachery, if it is not a true perversion of the moral sense. Perversion or treachery, this unbelievable twisting of evidence, this scandalous reversal of roles, makes one wish to answer, It is your turn now. Many standing before the ruins of Berlin and Dresden will think, This is really the least that they deserved. And they will perhaps decide that this people responsible for the greatest catastrophe in history still got off easy. Those who are moved by neither the slaughter at Lidice, nor the massacre at Oradour, nor the hangings at Tulle, nor the shootings at Mont-Valérien, Châteaubriant, Cascade, and Chatou reserve their indignation for the bombing of Dresden by the English, as if in this domain the Germans had not taken the initiative, as if the destruction of Rotterdam, Warsaw, and Coventry by an implacable adversary had not preceded the Anglo-American air raids. To the bombing of Dresden, which chills us with its horror, Auschwitz adds a new dimension of horror. By this I mean its directed, methodical, and *selective* character. It is truly the monstrous masterpiece of hate. The anonymous and in some ways impersonal violences of war, which indiscriminately crushed unfortunate, defenseless citizens, did not choose their victims as the refined sadism of the Germans chose its victims. Strictly speaking, these were unintended atrocities. The unconscious pilot who blindly dropped his bomb on Hiroshima did not select among the human cattle,

nor did he destroy Hiroshima out of wickedness; he did not deny the Japanese's right to live; he was not looking to humiliate, trample, and degrade his victim before killing him. His purpose was not to exterminate the Japanese race nor to vilify its people but to hasten, albeit through terror, the end of the conflict. Nor can the extermination of the Jews be compared to the massacres that the bloody despots of history organized to rid themselves of their enemies. Certainly (and in this at least the Nazis were more right than they believed themselves to be) the Jews are natural enemies of fascism. However, the extermination of the Jews is neither an act of vengeance nor a precaution. It has nothing in common with the deplorable excesses that so often come in the wake of revolutions but that, however, were not meant to be by the revolutionary, for terrorism is less often an express intention of the revolutionary than a degeneration of the revolution. The extermination of the Jews is something completely different. Hitler said long in advance what he was going to do and why he planned to do it—according to what principles, in the name of what dogma. He explained himself at length, with that inimitable combination of metaphysical pedantry and sadism that is a German specialty. The pedantic tone of German racism reminds me of both the communiqués of the Wehrmacht and the gibberish of Heidegger, and everyone knows that today it has become one of the signs of philosophical profundity. The theoreticians of racism and the practitioners of scientific atrocity are both as meticulous as they are bloody, as long-winded as they are ferocious. The extermination of the Jews was not, as was the massacre of the Armenians, a sudden outbreak of violence; it was doctrinally founded, philosophically explained, methodically prepared, and systematically perpetrated by the most pedantic dogmatists that ever existed. It fulfills an intention to exterminate that was long and deliberately matured; it is the application of a dogmatic theory that still exists and is called anti-Semitism. I would also willingly say, reversing the terms of the prayer that Jesus addresses to God in the Gospel according to Luke: Father, do not forgive them, for they know precisely what they do.

It is thus not a matter of the misfortunes of war. It is a matter of a quite precise and very urgent problem: if we had allowed the Brid'oison to babble about the bombing of Dresden and soon (who knows?) about the "crimes" of the Resistance, statutory limitations would have gone into effect on 8 May 1965. Do we want Doctor Mengele, the executioner of children, the sadist who performed experiments on deportees, to soon go home to Germany and peacefully return to his work (one trembles to think of it) as a "practitioner"? Would you like him to publish his memoirs soon, as everyone does, with Whatsitsname Press? But it would be too easy to arrest only that horrible doctor, and the discovery of a number of great criminals would do more harm than good if it should serve as a pretext for bestowing on all the others a general dismissal of charges. The painstaking, administrative, scientific, metaphysical massacre of six

million Jews is not a misfortune "in itself" nor a natural disaster; it is a crime for which an entire people is more or less responsible, and that people, after all, has a name and there is no reason not to speak the name of this people nor to succumb to the strange modesty that today prohibits us from pronouncing it. A crime that was perpetrated in the name of German superiority engages the national responsibility of all Germans. The two Germanies, descendants of the National Socialist state, have accounts to settle; that is a fact. The monstrous machine for crushing children, for destroying Jews, Slavs, and Resistance fighters by the hundreds of thousands, could only have functioned thanks to innumerable complacities and in the complacent silence of all; the torturers tortured, and the small fry of minor criminals helped out or laughed. Alas! from the mechanic for the convoys that took the deportees to their deaths to the despicable bureaucrat who kept the list of victims, there were indeed few innocent among the millions of mute or complicit Germans. To say that it will still take a long time to discover all of the complex ramifications of the crime is not to say that the Germans are *collectively* responsible or are responsible inasmuch as they are Germans. There were some German democrats in the camps, and we respectfully salute this elite lost in the vociferous mob of others, of all the others. Here one cannot pass over in silence the amazing gesture of Chancellor Brandt before the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto. Moreover, the admirable courage of Beate Klarsfeld proves that the elite of the younger generation of Germans knew how to take over from the elite of whom I have just spoken. Outside of these elites, an entire people was associated, more or less closely, with the enterprise of the gigantic extermination; a people unanimously gathered around its leader, whom it wildly approved many times, for whom it so many times affirmed its enthusiastic support, and in whom it recognized itself. The frightful howling from the Nuremberg rallies still rings in our ears. That a debonair people could have turned into that pack of enraged dogs is an inexhaustible source of perplexity and wonder. Will anyone reproach us for comparing these malefactors to dogs? I swear in fact that the comparison is unfair to dogs. Dogs would not have invented the crematoria, nor thought to inject phenol into the hearts of children.

Has Anyone Asked for Our Pardon?

Perhaps statutory limitations would hold less importance if the purge had been more sincere and complete, if one felt more spontaneity as well as more unanimity in the evocation of these terrible memories. Alas, the disproportion between the tragedy of those four accursed years and the frivolity of our contemporaries will stand beyond doubt as one of the most bitter ironies of history. Should we be asked to forgive and forget? Those for whom the shootings at Mont-Valérien and the massacres at Oradour never amounted to much, those for whom nothing in particular

occurred between 1940 and 1945 beyond some difficulties in obtaining supplies, those people have been reconciled with such a “polite” occupying force since 1945; the day after the armistice of 1945 they had already forgotten what they were not at all eager to remember. They did not wait twenty years for statutory limitations to go into effect. When they speak of the “wall of shame,” you understand that they are thinking of the wall that inhibits communication between the two Berlins; they are not aware of the tragic wall that enclosed the five hundred thousand condemned to die in the Warsaw Ghetto. A pardon? It was already foreshadowed during the occupation itself in their consent to defeat and unhealthy abandonment to nothingness, and it appeared immediately after the war in the rearming of malefactors, in the rehabilitation of malefactors, in shameful leniency toward the ideology of malefactors. Thanks to indifference, moral amnesia, and general superficiality, pardoning today is a *fait accompli*. Everything is already pardoned and settled. There is nothing left for us now but to establish a sister city relationship between Oradour and Munich. Certain remarkably unembittered French citizens found it completely natural six months after the war to renew fruitful business and recreational contacts with the former torturers of their homeland. As if the frightful humiliation of 1940 did not concern them. As if the shame of capitulation had never touched them. Sure, go vacation in Germany. Austria welcomes you. Autumn in Ravensbrück is marvelous. Forgetfulness had already done its work before statutory limitations; after statutory limitations forgetfulness would become in a sense official and normative. Our epoch is indeed lighthearted. From here on we would have the *right* to be lighthearted; we would have a juridically light heart.

As for the Germans themselves, why would they feel ostracized when no one was asking them to justify themselves? There is something amazing about the good conscience of the Germans today. The Germans are an unrepentant people. If Germany seems to have a new face, it is because it received its deathblow at Stalingrad, because the Russians took Berlin, because the Allies disembarked at Normandy and the Free French Forces disembarked in Provence; without the tanks of Joukov, Patton, and Leclerc Germany would still be controlled by Hitler, and triumphant Nazism would reign throughout Europe on the ashes of martyrs. What would have become of the trampled and enslaved peoples if the enraged dogs of Europe had had heavy water before the Allies? German repentance, its name is Stalingrad, its name is the breakthrough at Avranches, its name is defeat. It is military repentance, and it is also commercial repentance for business purposes, diplomatic repentance for reasons of state; their contrition is worth nothing. Germany deferred statutory limitations for five years, as it had accorded reparations to Israel or offered indemnities to the spoliated, because this was in its interest at the moment, because it sought to “make up” for its past misdeeds. Under pres-

sure from democratic public opinion in Europe and from the unified Resistance, Germany in fact offered this trifling extension of the period for statutory limitations, but after how much procrastination and deplorable haggling! The right-thinking people who were irritated by our refusal to wipe the slate clean will no doubt seize the opportunity of this extension to finally think about other things. Perhaps public opinion, which the passion of the Resistance at last managed to arouse, will now allow itself to be demobilized in turn? But we, we know perfectly well that the grace of conversion has not suddenly touched the Germans. Certain scandalous verdicts,⁸ some worrisome signs—everything declares the spectacular bad faith of the Germans. And the Austrians will display this more and more in their pursuit of criminals whom in their innermost heart of hearts they cannot bring themselves to repudiate. If they pursue them reluctantly and without conviction, it is because they recognize themselves in them.

To pardon! But who ever asked us for a pardon? It is only the distress and the dereliction of the guilty that would make a pardon sensible and right. When the guilty are fat, well nourished, prosperous, enriched by the “economic miracle,” a pardon is a sinister joke. No, a pardon is not suitable for the swine and their sows. Pardoning died in the death camps. Our horror over that which properly speaking reason cannot conceive would smother pity at its birth. If only the accused could have shown us pity. The accused cannot have it all ways—cannot reproach the victims for their resentment, vindicate their own patriotism and good intentions, and presume to be pardoned. One must choose! To presume to be pardoned one must admit to being guilty, without conditions or alleging extenuating circumstances. Today is the first time since 1945 that the Germans have pretended to apologize; they have discovered that they perhaps have some accounts to settle with us, and they offer the alms of a few explanations. If we have not heard before now a single word of sympathy it is because we fled from all contact with the Germans. Was it for the injured to seek such contact? German men and women did not then think of this all by themselves? Would they have had the idea of writing so many beautiful, emotional letters to the weekly newspapers if we had not protested against statutory limitations? Nothing better proves the lack of spontaneity of a certain segment of the young German population, its lack of urgency to go before the victims, its lack of basic good conscience. Get ahead of one’s victim, that was the thing; ask for a pardon! We have waited for a word for a long time, a single word of understanding and sympathy. We have wished for it, this fraternal word! Certainly we did not expect that they would beg our forgiveness. But the understanding word, we would have received it with gratitude, with tears

8. See Bernard Lavergne’s excellent study, “L’Absolution en Allemagne des crimes de guerre,” *Année politique et économique*, no. 183 (1945).

in our eyes. Alas! as an act of repentance, the Austrians have presented us with the shameful acquittal of torturers. We are still waiting for the solemn gesture of reparation or disavowal that such a terrible moral responsibility imposed on German intellectuals, on German professors, on German philosophers, and even (I do not feel like laughing) on German “moralists,” if there be any. But German intellectuals and moralists have nothing to say. This does not concern them. They are very busy with the “Dasein” and “the existential project.” And yet the intellectuals could spare a manifesto! The initiative will never come, nor will the grand protest by which German thought would have dissociated itself unconditionally from that hallucinatory past, which concerns it after all, and would have rejected it with horror. And how could it repudiate a doctrine in which Heidegger is immediately recognizable and that so clearly bears the stamp of Nietzsche? It must be said: Germany as a whole—its youth, its thinkers—they all have bypassed the most horrible tragedy in history; they have no connection with the exterminated millions without sepulchers, no way to think about that catastrophe; they feel in no way responsible, acknowledge no mistake. Apparently their so-called existentialism does not extend that far. Why would we pardon those who regret their errors so little and so rarely? Robert Minder says forcefully that Heidegger is responsible not only for what he said under Nazism but also for what he refused to say in 1945.⁹ On the contrary, the German today seems to have acquired an overwhelming pruritus to discuss, contest, and even accuse; he takes the high ground, metes out praise and blame. Not him—he does not agree. Agree about what? About the number of victims? About the kind of gas used to asphyxiate women and children? It is like a dream. Soon we will feel guilty in our turn regarding the Germans, though happy that they will concede that there was error on both sides. Where did they get this confidence? Where did this amazing good conscience come from? No doubt we should say, this total lack of consciousness! It is Germany that is decidedly the offended party and whose distress is of concern to fine minds. Will the deportees apologize in their turn for having held public attention for so long? The way things are going, we will wind up discovering that the torturers were truly the victims of their victims. It is not the millions of exterminated that interest our Sudeten or Parisian journalism but the fate of the unfortunate Germans expelled from Prussia and Bohemia by the Slavs. From now on it is no longer a matter of the massive slaughter of innocents, the victims of German rage. What matters is knowing whether Heidegger has been slandered, and it is we who must settle accounts with him! Millions of unfortunates died of hunger, cold, and misery in the concentration camps, but the great thinker, he will die in his bed a great thinker. All the

9. See Robert Minder, “Hebel et Heidegger: Lumière et obscurantisme,” in *Utopies et institutions au dix-huitième siècle*, ed. P. Francastel (Paris, 1963).

same, we will not begin a conversation with the metaphysicians of National Socialism, nor with their friends, nor with the friends of their friends, nor with the *Sturmabteilungen* of German philosophy. For we grant them only one right: to pray if they are Christians and to ask our pardon if they are not. And in any case to be silent.

Beyond this there is something shocking in seeing former collaborators, the most frivolous and egotistical of men, those who neither suffered nor fought, recommend that we forget past offenses; they invoke "charitable duty" to preach to the victims about a pardon that the torturers themselves never asked for. Caring for the victims, taking account of their injuries, is this not also a charitable duty? As for the exterminated millions, the tortured children, they are as worthy as the Germans and other Sudeten of moving the proponents of pardoning. And who, if you please, are these indulgent judges? Why are they in such a hurry to turn the page and to say, with the former SS officers, *Schluss damit?* Where were they, what did they do during the war? On what grounds would they dare offer pardons in our name? Who asked them or gave them the right to do it? Everyone is free to pardon the offenses that he has personally suffered if he chooses to, but those of others, what right does he have to pardon them? Jean Cassou also addresses the friends of the Nazis: "Who are you, you who make yourselves the defenders of Nazi criminals? In whose name, by whose authority, in light of what principles, in the service of what interests, to what ends do you judge yourself qualified to ask that we cease all proceedings against them and leave them forever in peace?" I would add this: I do not see why it should be up to us, the survivors, to pardon. Let us rather beware that complacency about our beautiful soul and our noble conscience, that the opportunity to assume a pathetic attitude and the temptation of playing a role do not one day make us forget the martyrs. It is not a question of being sublime; it is enough to be loyal and serious. In fact, why should we retain for ourselves this magnanimous role of pardoner? As Olivier Clément, an Eastern Orthodox Christian, wrote me in admirable terms, it is for the victims to pardon. What qualifies the survivors to pardon in the place of the victims or in the name of their relatives, their families? No, it is not our place to pardon on behalf of the little children whom the brutes tortured to amuse themselves. The little children must pardon them themselves. While we turn to the brutes, and to the friends of the brutes, and tell them, Ask the little children to pardon you yourselves.

Let the others, those who are not concerned, not blame us if we dwell indefinitely on the litanies of bitterness. This matter will not be easily settled. When six million human beings are murdered in the name of principles, is it not to be expected that the survivors will speak of it for awhile, that they must irritate and tire others? Many years will still be necessary for us to revive from our stupor, for the mystery of that demented hatred to be wholly elucidated. Our contemporaries will no

doubt decide that we speak much too much about the death camps; and they would no doubt wish that we did not speak of them any more at all. But we have not spoken of them enough; we will never have spoken of them enough! In fact, have we ever really spoken of them? Let us not be afraid to say it: Now is the first that we have spoken of them. For the importance of what happened is far from being universally acknowledged. The suffering beyond measure that marked those accursed years is out of all proportion to the pathetically inadequate renewal that the postwar period has brought us. Bitter, scandalous irony of history! It is almost without precedent that such a terrible cataclysm should have such meager consequences, that the remorse for such a tragedy, the greatest tragedy of modern times, should slip away so quickly, and almost without leaving any trace in human memory. So many tears, and to come to this! Since 1945 other causes have mobilized generous people, and other injustices have aroused the indignation of youth; sometimes they have even provided an alibi by creating a diversion from our obsessive nightmare, by keeping us from *realizing* this horrible thing, the thought of which, strictly speaking, no person can bear. Since nothing more can be done against the German factories of death, let us at least protest, and with all our strength while there is still time, against torture. This way we have avoided despair. Fortunately, the newly persecuted are not alone any longer, because democrats from around the world join their cause. But the Jews, they were alone. Absolutely alone. That poignant solitude, that absolute dereliction is one of the most frightful aspects of their ordeal. There was not yet a United Nations, nor international solidarity. The press was silent. The Catholic Church was silent. Neither one nor the other had anything to say. Roosevelt knew, but he remained silent in order not to demoralize the boys. The Poles were horrified but little inclined to run risks for the Jews, and let death do its diabolical work almost before their eyes. Everyone is more or less guilty of nonassistance toward a people threatened with death. "Universal conscience," as the paladins of the "holy war" call it, was certainly more moved by the burning of the roof of a mosque than by the premeditated and scientific slaughter of six million human beings. This is why we say that we have never spoken of this thing. We must indeed finally speak of it. We must indeed say what it was, must we not?

But in the face of what has happened, what should we do? In the proper sense of the verb *do* all one can do now is make impotent, symbolic, even irrational gestures, like refusing to go to Germany any more—much less Austria—and to accept neither indemnities from the Germans nor their reparations. Reparations, alas! Reparations for little Jewish children whom German officers, to amuse themselves, chose as living targets for shooting practice. Aided by the exigencies of cohabitation, torturers retired from their business of torture will always find negotiating partners little repelled enough to enter lightheartedly into financial relations

of mutual interest to them and to take on what we are too disgusted to do. Our refusal is not without meaning, however. André Neher clarified the moral significance of that refusal with admirable seriousness and bravery.¹⁰ It was time for Neher to remind us of it: life without reasons for living is not worth living; life without reasons for living is only what it is—the life of an ant or a sheep. In our turn, we say to the Germans, Keep your indemnities, crime doesn't pay. There are no damages that can compensate us for the execution of six million; there are no reparations for the irreparable. We don't want your money. Your marks horrify us, as does, even more so, your truly German intention of offering them to us. No, business isn't everything. No, vacationing isn't everything, nor is tourism, nor are lovely trips or festivals, if they are Austrian. But you can't understand that. We give up all of these very attractive benefits wholeheartedly. And as we cannot be friends with everyone, we choose to irritate the fans of Franco-German sister-city agreements rather than hurt the survivors of hell.

And thus something is incumbent upon us. These innumerable dead, these massacred, these tortured, these trampled, these offended, are *our business*. Who would speak of them if we did not speak of them? Who would even think of them? In the universal moral amnesty long accorded to the assassins, the massacred have only us to think about them. If we ceased to think of them, we would complete their extermination, and they would be definitively annihilated. The dead depend entirely on our loyalty. Such is the case for the past in general; the past needs us to help it, to recall it to the forgetful, the frivolous, and the indifferent. Our celebrations must endlessly save it from nothingness, or at least hold back the nonbeing to which it is destined. The past needs us to come together expressly to commemorate it because the past needs our memory. No, the struggle between the irresistible tide of forgetfulness that eventually overwhelms everything and the desperate, intermittent protestations of memory is not a fair fight; in advising forgetfulness, the proponents of pardoning thus recommend something that does not need to be recommended. The forgetful will take care of that themselves; they are only too happy to. It is the past that calls for our pity and our gratitude, for the past on its own cannot defend itself as the present and the future defend themselves. And young people demand to know about it and suspect that we are hiding something from them; and in fact we do not always know how to reveal the terrible secrets of which we are the bearers: the extermination camps, the hangings at Tulle, the massacre at Oradour. By invoking these days of rage, calamity, and tribulation, we protest against the work of extermination and against the forgetfulness that completed it, that sealed that work forever; we protest against the

10. See Neher, "Non à l'Allemagne," *L'Arche* (Mar. 1965), as well as "Dimensions et limites du dialogue judéo-allemand depuis 1945."

dark lake that swallowed up so many precious lives. We do not clear our debts to these precious lives, to the Resistance fighters, to the massacred, by commemorating the Day of Deportation once a year, by delivering a speech, by putting flowers on a grave. We who by the most miraculous of chances survive are not better than they are; all the same we who escaped the massacre are not more to be pitied than they; all the same, our night is not more black than theirs. We were spared the atrocious ordeal of these martyrs; we and our children will not know their trials. Did we deserve such luck? What happened is unique in history and doubtless will never happen again, for there have been no other examples since the beginning of time; a day will come when we will no longer even be able to explain this ever-inexplicable chapter in the annals of hate. It would be a comfort to be able to trivialize this nightmare: a war like all the others—won by one, lost by another, and accompanied by the inevitable misfortunes of war; in these abstractions there would be nothing that was not completely ordinary, nothing that could upset the tranquillity of a good conscience or trouble the sleep of unconsciousness. But, no, sleep does not return. We think about it during the day; we dream about it at night. And since we cannot spit on tourists or throw stones at them, only one resource remains: to remember, to gather one's thoughts. Here where we can "do" nothing we can at least *feel*, inexhaustibly. This is doubtless what the brilliant advocates of statutory limitations will call our resentment, our inability to settle the past. But in fact was that past ever a present for them? The sentiment that we experience is not called rancor but horror—insurmountable horror over what happened, horror of the fanatics who perpetrated this thing, of the passive who accepted it, and the indifferent who have already forgotten it. This is our "resentment" [*ressentiment*]. For *ressentiment* can also be the renewed and intensely lived feeling of the inexplicable thing; it protests against a moral amnesty that is nothing but shameful amnesia; it maintains the sacred flame of disquiet and faith to invisible things. Forgetfulness here would be a grave insult to those who died in the camps and whose ashes are forever mixed in the earth. It would be a lapse of seriousness and dignity, a shameful frivolity. Yes, the memory of what happened is indelible in us, indelible like the tattoos that the survivors still wear on their arms. Each spring the trees bloom at Auschwitz as they do everywhere, for the grass is not too disgusted to grow in those accursed fields; springtime does not distinguish between our gardens and those places of inexpressible misery. Today when the sophists recommend forgetfulness, we will forcefully mark our mute and impotent horror before the dogs of hate; we will think hard about the agony of the deportees without sepulchers and of the little children who did not come back. Because this agony will last until the end of the world.